The Waning Sword
Conversion Imagery and Celestial Myth in Beowulf

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12. Another Tale of Two Creatures

The Loss and Recovery of the Solar Draught-Beast in Wið Dweorh

An understanding of Riddle 29 may help elucidate a notoriously obscure Old English text, the meaning of which has long been debated. If the following new interpretation is broadly correct, it records another myth about the loss and concealment of sunlight (compare the giant sword) due to the actions of a horned creature possibly associated with the moon (compare Grendel), and that light’s recovery by the sun or a solar emissary, described, as in the riddle, as a wiht ‘creature’ (compare Beowulf). If accepted, this interpretation attests to the wider presence of myths about the moon’s theft of sunlight in Old English literature and encourages perception of the same basic theme in Beowulf.

The text in question is the somewhat riddle-like metrical charm Wið dweorh ‘Against a dwarf/fever’, part of the Lacnunga. The fever could well be convulsive, as one late Old English medical text describes how a patient suffering from a tight chest or asthma at times riþaþ ‘writhes/shakes(?)’ as if he on dueorge sy ‘he is on [or ‘in’, i.e., perhaps ‘in a state of’ or ‘in the clutches of’] a dueorg’. This fever was probably attributed to a type of mythological creature now better known from Norse mythology: a ‘dwarf’, OE dweorh (dweorg, dueorg) being cognate with ON dvergr ‘dwarf’. Norse dwarves were a race of often nocturnal, chthonic beings

1 See DOE s.v. dweorg, both senses of which apply here, since, I believe, a dwarf has caused a fever, quite likely convulsive.
3 The word’s etymology is disputed; see G. Kroonen, Etymological Dictionary of Proto-Germanic (Leiden, 2013), s.v. *dverga-. Kroonen, however, proposes an attractive
who were famed as metalworkers and swordsmiths—they forged the sword Snarvendill, for instance. As we shall see later in this study, some were also identified with the moon and involved in myths about the theft and return of sunlight.

From a reference in the charm’s initial prose instructions to the Seven Sleepers of Ephesus, we may infer that the patient could not sleep, that he or she had a night-fever. The full text reads:

+ Wið dweorh: man sceal niman VII lytle oflætan swylce man mid ofrað, and wrītan þas naman on ælcre oflætan: Maximianus, Malchus, Iohannes, Martimianus,4 Dionisius, Constantinus, Serafion. Þænne eft þæt galdor þæt hereafter cwē man sceal singan, ærest on þæt wynstre eare, þænne on þæt swiðre eare, þænne bufan þæs mannes moldan; and ga þænne an maedman to and ho hit on his sweoran, and do man swa þry dagas; him bið sona sel.

‘Her com ingangan inswiden5 wiht.
Hæfde him his haman on handa.

 derivation from ‘the strong verb *dweergan- attested in MHG zwergan ... “to squeeze, press”’. If the early Germanic dwarf was imagined as both a ‘squeezer/presser’ and a ‘squeezed/pressed one’, this could explain otherwise puzzlingly disparate aspects of traditions about this type of creature: (a) its association with feverish convulsions and respiratory constriction in England and possibly Scandinavia/Iceland; (b) its traditionally small stature, in Norse lore perhaps partly attributable to the compressing weight of the heavens which four dwarves named after the cardinal points had to uphold (SnEGylf, 12); (c) its identification in Norse mythology, through at least the prominent dwarf called Niði, with the waning moon, which gives the impression of being squeezed (see Chapter 13); (d) its skill in Norse and German tradition as a smith, in which capacity it pressed metal by hammering. Prior studies of the Germanic dwarf include L. Motz, The Wise One of the Mountain: Form, Function and Significance of the Subterranean Smith: A Study in Folklore (Göppingen, 1983); P. Battles, ‘Dwarfs in Germanic Literature: Deutsche Mythologie or Grimm’s Myths?’, in T. Shippey (ed.), The Shadow-Walkers: Jacob Grimm’s Mythology of the Monstrous (Turnhout, 2005), 29–82; Armann Jakobsson, ‘The Hole’; Hafstein, ‘Groaning Dwarfs’; Armann Jakobsson, ‘The Hole’; Ármann Jakobsson, ‘Enabling Love: Dwarfs in Old Norse-Icelandic Romances’, in J. Denzin and K. Wolf (ed.), Romance and Love in Late Medieval and Early Modern Iceland: Essays in Honor of Marianne Kalinke (Ithaca, 2008), 183–206; W. Schäfke, ‘Was ist eigentlich ein Zwerg? Eine prototypensemantische Figurenanalyse der dvergar in der Sagaliteratur’, Mediaevistik 23 (2010), 197–299.

4 Probably a scribal error for Martinianus.

5 MS inspiden, a long-standing crux, is probably a corruption resulting from the scribe having written a ‘p’ rather than a ‘ƿ’ (the letter called ‘wynn’, transcribed as ‘w’ in the edited text above); alternatively, scholars may have misread ‘ƿ’ as ‘p’. The proposed -swiden is cognate with ON sviðin, past participle of sviða ‘to singe, roast, smart, burn’, as observed in B. R. Hutcheson, ‘Wið Dweorh: An Anglo-Saxon
Cwæð þæt þu his hæncgest wære.
Legðe þe his teage an sweoran.
Ongunnan him of þæm lande lípan.
Sona swa hy of þæm lande coman,
þa ongunnan him ða líþu colian.
þa com ingangan deores\textsuperscript{6} sweostar.
þa geændade heo and aðas swor
ðet næfre þis ðæm adlegan derian\textsuperscript{7} ne moste,
ne þæm þe þis galdor begytan mihte,
oðde þe þis galdor ongalan cuþe.
Amen. Fiað.\textsuperscript{8}

\textsuperscript{49} Against a dwarf/fever: one must take seven little sacramental wafers such as one makes offertory with, and write these names on each wafer: Maximianus, Malchus, Iohannes, Martimianus, Dionisius, Constantinus,

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\textsuperscript{6} The manuscript reading \textit{deores} ‘of the beast’ makes sense, and even though the resulting line lacks alliteration, this need not necessarily indicate corruption as the whole incantation is, at least by the standards of ‘classical’ Old English verse, metrically irregular. The word is emended \[ea\]res in J. H. G. Grattan and C. Singer, \textit{Anglo-Saxon Magic and Medicine Illustrated Specially from the Semi-Pagan Text ‘Lacnunga’} (London, 1952), 162–3, the unattested \[*Ear* being explained as ‘a divine name connected with the brightness of the morning sky’; in their view, Ear’s sister is Eastre, goddess of dawn. Hutcheson, \textit{‘Wið Dweorh’} defends the same emendation. It remains an intriguing possibility, which the present interpretation might easily be adapted to accommodate, but when sisters appear in other fever-charms it is as fever-demons, such as the seven fever-sisters of the eleventh-century ‘Sigismund Fever Charm’; see F. Wallis (ed.), \textit{Medieval Medicine: A Reader} (Toronto, 2010), 69; cf. also the maidens of Hell who deal out night-shivers to a man in \textit{Sólarljóð} 38. Furthermore, female disease-demons swear not to harm those who know a particular charm in other texts; see Pettit, \textit{Anglo-Saxon Remedies}, II, 195. If alliteration is deemed necessary, an alternative emendation of \textit{deores} would be \[*indeores* ‘of the inward-beast’, assuming haplography after \textit{ingangan}. This emendation would strengthen the parallel with \textit{ingangan ins[we] iden} in line 1. Although \[*indeor* is not attested in surviving Old English records, it would not only make sense in context—assuming the ‘beast’ resided inside the sufferer—but also be comparable to other Old English words for internal afflictions: \textit{inadl} ‘internal disease’, \textit{incoðu} ‘internal disease’, \textit{ingeswel} ‘internal swelling’, \textit{instice} ‘internal stabbing pain’, \textit{inwund} ‘inward wound’ and \textit{inwyrm} ‘internal worm’.

\textsuperscript{7} If alliteration is deemed necessary, \textit{derian} might be emended to the synonymous \textit{eglian} on the assumption that a scribe replaced a rarer verb with a commoner one.

\textsuperscript{8} Adapted from Pettit, \textit{Anglo-Saxon Remedies}, I, 72, 74, the second volume of which summarizes prior interpretations of the charm, none of which are, in my view, satisfactory.

\textsuperscript{9} This symbol contributes to the charm’s Christian potency. It may indicate that the practitioner should make the sign of the Cross when performing the cure.
Serafion. Then afterwards one must sing the incantation that is related hereafter, first into the left ear, then into the right ear, then above the crown of the person’s head; and then let a virgin go to him and hang it on his neck, and let it be done so for three days; he will soon be better.

‘Here came walking in an internally [or perhaps “inherently”/“very”] singed creature. It had its hame in its hands, said that you were its horse. It laid its ties on your neck. They began to journey from the land. As soon as they came from the land, then the limbs began to cool. Then came walking in the beast’s [deores] sister. Then she interceded and swore oaths that this [i.e., this deor ‘beast’ or fever] might never harm the sick person, nor the one who could obtain this incantation or who knew how to recite this incantation. Amen. Let it be so.’

I propose that the first four lines of the incantatory section, which the healer recites into the patient’s ears and above the crown of his or her head, address a fever-causing dwarf-beast which has entered the patient’s skull. The incantation evokes a remedial precedent in which a singed wiht entered, identified the dwarf-beast as its ‘horse’, and laid on its neck a hame with attached cords, possibly with some difficulty. It then journeyed from the land with the dwarf-beast implicitly drawing a solar cart or chariot, whereupon the feverish limbs of the patient, whom they had left behind, began to cool. At that point, the sister of the

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10 These are the names of the Seven Sleepers of Ephesus.
11 If my interpretation is correct, the healer’s pinpointing and expulsion of the disease-demon find broad parallel in the Canterbury Runic Charm’s command far þú nú, fundinn ertu ‘go now, you are found!’ (see Chapter 9).
12 OED s.v. hame a.: ‘Each of two curved pieces of wood or metal placed over, fastened to, or forming, the collar of a draught horse.’ Assuming this interpretation is correct, it is the only surviving instance of this word in Old English. DOE s.v. hama does not commit to a definition of this instance, but given the explicitly equine context, the meaning ‘hame’ is surely to be preferred to the main alternative, namely ‘(disguising) covering’, ‘skin’. The precise nature of the attached teage ‘ties’ is uncertain, but they may well be ‘traces’ attached to the draught-horse’s collar (see OED s.v. trace n.2 1); a completely different meaning of OE teag, ‘case’, ‘chest’ seems less applicable.
13 Irish English has an expression ‘to make a hames of (something)’, which means ‘to make a mess of (something)’, ‘possibly because it is difficult to put the hames on a horse the right way up’; T. P. Dolan, A Dictionary of Hiberno-English: The Irish Use of English (Dublin, 1998), s.v. hames. Cf. OED s.v. hame a., quotation for 1883.
14 By contrast, many scholars—among them, Battles, ‘Dwarfs’, 35—interpret the wiht as the affliction-causing dwarf who mounts the patient (its ‘horse’) in the manner of a nightmare-monster. But the creature’s hame indicates use of the ‘horse’ as a draught-animal, not a mount.
dwarf-beast appeared and declared the incantation’s perennial efficacy for those who possessed it and knew how to recite it.  

Comparably to the intention of the thief in Riddle 29, the dwarf-beast is imagined, I think, to have concealed sunlight within a form of stronghold. In the riddle, the thief and the sunshine are implicitly separate at first, but become one when the thief places the radiant plunder between its horns on its way home, before being separated again. In the charm, the agent responsible for the concealment and the removed sunshine appear consubstantial throughout (see below) and the stronghold is identifiable as the skull of the patient, who suffered from a night-fever because of the heat from the internalized sunlight.

The charm’s singed wiht who harnessed the dwarf-beast as a draught-horse is, I propose, a sun-deity or solar emissary comparable to the solar wiht of Riddle 29. After attaching the dwarf-beast to a cart or chariot, the presence of which may be inferred from the use of a hame, the wiht journeyed ‘from the land’—that is, the sun-god or solar emissary ascended into the sky, possibly over the cooling waters of the sea. With the removal of the internalized heat, and the concomitant

15 If the sister is herself a dwarf, her healing function is echoed by the remedial powers of later dwarves of medieval romance, for which, see Battles, ‘Dwarfs’; Ærmann Jakobsson, ‘Enabling Love’. Although the vast majority of dwarves mentioned in medieval texts are male, a few females appear in late medieval Norse sagas. In addition, Queen Virginal, a character in the German story of Virginal (written sometime after 1260), was probably originally a dwarf-queen, as noted by Battles, ‘Dwarfs’, 60. For discussion, see A. Liberman, ‘What Happened to Female Dwarfs?’, in R. Simek and W. Heizmann (ed.), Mythological Women: Studies in Memory of Lotte Motz 1922–1997 (Vienna, 2002), 257–63; Ærmann Jakobsson, ‘The Hole’, 68–9; U. Mikučionis, ‘The Family Life of the Dwarfs and its Significance for Relationships between Dwarfs and Humans in the Sagas’, Maal og Minne 2 (2014), 155–91 at 165–70.


17 Cf. the implicitly charred blackness of the Old Norse fire-giant Surtr ‘Black One’, who wields a fiery, solar sword; also Song of Songs 1:6.

18 OE līðan often describes journeys over the sea (ÖED s.v. līthe v.). A pun on līðan ‘to assuage’ is conceivable. Cf. the journey of Ing’s wain over waves (probably) in the Old English Rune Poem.
strengthening of the external sun, the patient’s fever subsided. Fevers are often severest at night, and lessen when morning comes.

An Old English Dwarf-Horse-Deer?

This interpretation immediately raises a question. Why should a sun-god or solar emissary call the offending dwarf his hæncgest ‘(male) horse’, by which, judging from the reference to the hame, is meant specifically a draught-horse?

That the sun-god’s carriage should have been drawn by a horse is not in itself surprising. Mythology offers many instances of this concept, some of which we noted in Chapter 6. They include the horse which draws the Trundholm chariot, the steeds which drew the golden chariot of Helios in Greek myth, and the equines of 2 Kings 23.11, to give but three examples. As the charm’s sun-god may travel over the cooling sea, the present ‘horse’ might also suggest a solar barque, a concept now best known from Egyptian mythology but also attested in prehistoric Scandinavian rock-art (which shows horse-headed solar ships), early Celtic coins, Greek and Indian myth—and, I shall propose in my conclusion, on some Anglo-Saxon or Anglo-Norse sword-pommels. OE hengest elsewhere appears in poetic compounds for ‘ship’, such as brimhengest and faröfhengest ‘sea-horse’.

But can a dwarf be a horse? After all, the Old English dwarf presumably, like its Old Norse counterpart, had a man-like aspect: Völuspá 10 appears to call dwarves manlíkun ‘man-likenesses’. As surprising as it may sound, as we shall shortly see, there does exist the distinct possibility of identification with a horse or similar quadruped.

19  DOE s.v. hengest.
20  OE hengest also refers to a draught-horse, possibly in the compound fæthengest, in Old English Riddle 22 (ASPR) in what is probably a celestial context describing the movement of the wagon of Ursa Major, which is not, however, drawn by that horse.
22  See West, Indo-European Poetry, 207–9; D. N. Briggs, ‘Reading the Images on Iron-Age Coins: 1. The Sun-Boat and its Passengers’, Chris Rudd List 104 (2009), 2–4; Kristiansen, ‘Rock Art’, 100; Meller, Der geschmiedete Himmel, 58–63; Panchenko, ‘Scandinavian Background’; Lahelma, ‘Circumpolar Context’. However, the sun simply veðr ‘wades’ to her bed in a tenth- or eleventh-century skaldic verse by the Icelander Skúli Þorsteinsson, for which see PTP, 367–8 (translates ‘strides’); SnESkild, I, 39.
If the dwarf somehow resembled both man and horse, this would not be wholly extraordinary, as we have evidence for other fantastic composite creatures in northern mythology.23 One we have already met is the centaur-like finngálkn. Vargeisa, it will be recalled, had a horse’s tail, hooves and mane, an elephant’s trunk and a human’s hands.24 Hjálmpár had to jump on her shoulders, effectively mounting her (like a horse?), in order to obtain the radiant sword Snarvendill, which had been made by dwarves. Additionally, a carving on the right side of the eighth-century Anglo-Saxon Franks Casket shows a creature with an animal’s head, a bird’s winged body, a human’s hands, and a horse’s legs and hooves presenting a warrior with a branch.25

More importantly, among the dwarves—described as ásmegir ‘sons of the gods’—who built the centre of the stronghold containing the sun-bright Menglpð in Svipdagsmál was Vegdrasill ‘Road/Glory Steed’ (Fjolsvinnsmál 34).26 Another text, mentioned in Chapter 8 for its inclusion of an analogue to Grendel’s mother, also strongly implies an identity between a dwarf and a draught-beast, in an episode which may reflect a myth in which a lunar dwarf stole sunlight.

Samsons saga fagra records how the thief Kvintalin forced a dwarf called Grelant/Grelent to capture Valentina, Samson’s future wife.27 The dwarf did so by building with wonderful skill a gulllega kerru ‘golden cart’ which mætti leiða … eftir sér ‘he could draw behind himself’ a hiolum ‘on wheels’;28 it contained food and a bed, and when Valentina stepped into it she suddenly fell asleep. Here, a crafty dwarf acts as both man-like creature—he converses with Kvintalin and demonstrates remarkable

24 She also appears later in the saga as a vulture with iron beak and iron claws.
25 Perhaps a prototype ‘twig-sword’, or, indeed, a relative of the gambanteinn.
26 Gould, ‘Dwarf-Names’, 954. For ON vegr ‘glory, honour’, which might relate to MHG wehen ‘to flash, radiate’, see ANEW s.v. vegr 1; ÍO s.v. vegur 2. The same stanza might identify another of the dwarf-builders as Liðskjálfr, a name interpretable as, among other things, ‘Joint/Limb Shake(r)’ with reference to a dwarf that causes or has a shivery or convulsive fever. This reading, however, is doubtful and emended away by Robinson, ‘Edition’, 79, 133–4; so, too, in the same context, is a possible reference to (a dwarf called?) Loki, otherwise the name of a god who famously took the form of a horse on one occasion.
27 The dwarf’s name meaning ‘Hailing’, in French at least. It is similar to Garlant, the name of Valentina’s father.
28 Bjarni Vilhjálmsson, Riddarasögur, III, 368–9; J. Wilson (ed.), Samsons saga fagra (Copenhagen, 1953), 22.
skill as an artificer—and draught-beast. That the cart he builds and draws is golden raises the possibility that it originated as a carriage akin to the gilded Trundholm solar chariot.²⁹ Grelant’s cart conceals the sleeping (solar?) love of Samson the Fair,³⁰ a hero whose name and appellation suggest an underlying solar aspect. Another feature of the story may also suggest a veiled solar dimension to Valentina’s abduction and recovery. During this episode Samson sees a swift stag with antlers of sunlike radiance (see Chapter 10 above), to which he gives chase, but which he fails to catch due to traps set by Kvintalin and Galinn. That the stag was actually Grelant, or was conjured by him, seems implied by the appearance on the scene of the dwarf and his golden cart, and the swift disappearance thereafter of both stag and dwarf. Shortly afterwards, a small boy arrived on a small donkey and proceeded to deceive Samson further. The boy claimed the dwarf was his master, but again there is a distinct possibility that he was a shape-shifted Grelant.

Grelant’s likely manifestations as both draught-horse and stag in a context suggestive of solar myth are especially interesting because the Old English charm’s dwarf may not have just had an equine aspect but also a cervine one. The charm identifies its dwarf first as a (draught)-horse, but subsequently refers to the *deores sweostar* ‘beast’s sister’, in which case the dwarf was presumably a *deor*.

OE *deor* ‘beast’ is the ancestor of modern English ‘deer’, but although the specialized cervine sense seems to have developed only in Middle English, the Old English word was typically used of savage animals or game—³¹—a category that excludes draught-horses. There are, furthermore, two instances of the Old English word’s use to describe deer. One is in the passage from the *Prose Dialogue of Solomon and Saturn* quoted in Chapter 10. The other describes reindeer in a passage from the Old English *Orosius*.³²

A key reason for proposing that the Old English dwarf may have had a cervine nature is the implicit equation of dwarves and deer in

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²⁹ It has been suggested that the cart was borrowed from Chretien de Troyes’ *Lancelot*, in which a dwarf drives a cart containing Lancelot (Waggoner, *Sagas of Imagination*, 429 n. 14). However, that cart is not golden and the dwarf does not draw it.

³⁰ For traditions of the sun’s going to bed and resting, see West, *Indo-European Poetry*, 211. When he thinks Valentina is dead, Samson is betrothed to a certain Ingina (or Ingiam)—cf. the Ingium or Ingumar of ON Ingumar-Freyr?

³¹ See DOE s.v. *deor*.

³² J. Bately (ed.), *The Old English Orosius*, EETS s.s. 6 (London, 1980), 15.
related Old Norse mythology. I reserve full details of this equation for the next chapter, but suffice it to say here that certain dwarves share their names with mythological stags. What is more, the Old Norse dwarves in question included a famous one, Dvalinn ‘One Who Had Delayed’ or ‘Torpid One’, who stole the sun and played with it too long, to his undoing. We shall find that Dvalinn is associated with the moon, quite possibly as a personification of a moon which dwelt too long in the sky and, like the lunar wiht of *Riddle 29*, was overcome by the rising sun.

Another important point in this regard is that, as noted earlier, stags apparently drew the solar chariot in early Scandinavia. We may also recall how Saxo describes Hotherus travelling in a cart drawn by harnessed reindeer on his quest for a marvellous sword (quite possibly solar), which he obtained from the nocturnal (quite possibly lunar) satyr Mimingus, probably from the concealment of his shadowy cave.

Also noteworthy, although it does not relate to dwarves, is an eye-catching compound noun found in the opening two lines of the fifth stanza of the *Codex Regius* text of *Völuspá*, which describe the world’s first dawn:

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\begin{align*}
\text{‘Sól varp sunnan, sinni mána,} \\
\text{hendi inni hægri um himinjóðýr’}
\end{align*}
\]

‘Sun, companion of Moon, cast from the south her right hand over the sky-horse-deer’

The triple-compound himinjóðýr (himinn + jór + dýr) ‘sky-horse-deer’, which could be singular or plural, appears only here—instead of um himinjóðýr, the Hauksbók text has the metrically deficient of jóður ‘over the rim’. Quite possibly the original reading was um himinjóður ‘over the sky-rim’ (i.e., horizon), but if the reading of the *Codex Regius* is entertained, one or more ‘sky-horse-deer’ apparently belonging to the sun would parallel the Old English charm’s draught-horse-deor (ON dýr is cognate with OE deor).

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33 On this name, see my subsequent remarks; also Gould, ‘Dwarf-Names’, 944; *PTP*, 695–6.

34 See also Dubois, ‘Mythic Sun’, 206–7 on the nurturing relationship of the sun to reindeer in Sámi tradition.
Here we should also note the blurred distinction between horses and horned beasts, especially stags, more widely in early European thought. Horned horses are a well-known mythological phenomenon, the most famous being the unicorn, which, according to Pliny’s *Naturalis Historia* (8.76), had a head resembling a stag and a body like a horse. Others include the Pegasus depicted on a British coin of the 1st century B.C, and instances on Germanic bracteates of the Migration Age. Older still, Bronze Age art from the Iberian Peninsula includes representations of hybrid stag-horses. Additionally, medieval Celtic and German stories tell of marvellous persons riding stags as if they were horses, the most famous being the titular character of Geoffrey of Monmouth’s *Vita Merlini* ‘Life of Merlin’ (c. 1150). Beneath a brightly shining horned moon, Merlin sat upon a stag, on which he rode forth when day dawned. Soon afterwards he killed a love-rival by tearing off his mount’s antlers and hurling them at the man’s head.

In turn, horned horses are not always mythical. There are rare instances of such aberrations in the historical record. And even if such real ‘horned’ horses have only very small ‘horns’, the archaeological record indicates that, at various times and places, people have equipped real horses with horned head-gear, including antlers.

Humans, for their part, could for millennia similarly ‘become’ stags. Antler headdresses worn by people number among the Mesolithic finds from a site at Star Carr in North Yorkshire. The

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37 See Gricourt and Hollard, *Cernunnos*, 122–3 and fig. 15.
41 See A. Little et al., ‘Technological Analysis of the World’s Earliest Shamanic Costume: A Multi-Scalar, Experimental Study of a Red Deer Headdress from the Early Holocene
famous Late Palaeolithic cave painting of the ‘Sorcerer’ from Trois Frères in Ariège, France, shows a humanoid figure arguably equipped with a stag’s antlers. Much later, Anglo-Saxons could ‘become’ stags, which is an especially significant finding if the Old English charm’s feverish patient were internally possessed by a dwarf-horse-stag; penitential literature records that some Anglo-Saxons went about in cervulo ‘in (the form of) a stag’—presumably cavorting in deer-skins and antlers—during heathen rites at the Kalends of January. Also noteworthy is the bearing of reindeer antlers by participants in the annual Abbots Bromley Horn Dance in Staffordshire; at least one of these antlers dates from c. 1065, though it is unknown whether such a dance was performed anything like as early. Even if it were not, the proposition that in pre-Conquest England a convulsive fever might have been attributed to possession by a bucking deer-spirit does not seem outlandish.

In view of all this evidence, I suggest (returning to the Old English charm) that, as night approached and the sun’s light faded, one of the sun-god’s radiant draught-horses may have turned into (or been possessed by) its dwarven alter ego, quite possibly through lunar agency. It had absconded (or been stolen) and concealed itself (or been hidden) inside the patient’s skull, thereby causing a convulsive nocturnal fever. Just before dawn, the sun-god or a solar emissary had arrived and reclaimed the errant beast, whereupon the cure had been effected.

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The charm’s Christianized prose introduction might offer a further clue to a celestial interpretation. The virgin’s placing of what was presumably a collar made from the seven holy wafers around the patient’s neck seems to echo and supplement both the wiht’s imposition of a hame on the dwarf and the assurance of remedial efficacy made by the beast’s sister. The three days over which the remedy must be performed might simply be a conventional period without special significance. Then again, they could correspond to the approximate length of the dark lunar phase, when the moon ‘hides’ from view.

Support for aspects of this interpretation may come from two little-known Old Norse texts concerning dwarves.

A Headache(?)-Causing Dwarf from Denmark

The first of these Old Norse texts is an eighth-century runic remedy inscribed on a fragment of the crown of a human skull found at Ribe, South Jutland. Its interpretation is uncertain, but it too seems to offer grounds for identifying a dwarf as a disease-agent, one that causes headache, a common accompaniment to fever.

The Old Norse inscription begins by naming three figures, at least one of whom is a god: Ulfr auk Óðinn auk Ho-tiur ‘Wolf (= Fenrir?) and Óðinn and High-Týr(?). Next come the words Hjálp buri es víðr þæima verki, which may mean ‘Búri/Buri is help against the pain’ or ‘There is help from Burr ‘Son’ [or ‘the borer’ (i.e., drill?)] against the pain’. Judging from the unusual choice of material for the inscription, the pain may have been a headache. The pain seems to have been attributed to a dwarf, as the next words are Auk dverg [= dvergr?] unninn Bóurr ‘And a/ the dwarf (is) overcome, Bóurr’.

Buri/Búri is elsewhere attested both as the name of Óðinn’s grandfather and the name of a dwarf. Whether Bóurr is the name of a/ the dwarf, the patient or the rune-carver (or someone else) is uncertain, but it looks as though it might be akin to Bívørr and Bávørr, two dwarf-names listed immediately after Alþjófr ‘All-Thief’ and Dvalinn ‘(One

45 McKinnell, Simek and Düwel, Runes, 50–1; MacLeod and Mees, Runic Amulets, 25–7; E. Moltke, Runes and their Origin: Denmark and Elsewhere (Copenhagen, 1985), 151–3, 346.
46 I quote from the standardized transcription in McKinnell, Simek and Düwel, Runes, 50.
Who Had) Delayed’ in a list of dwarf-names in Voluspá 11. Bívørr and Bávørr, at least the first of which possibly means ‘Shaker’ (cf. ON bifast ‘to shake’), perhaps allude to feverish shivering? As noted earlier, and we shall see in more detail later, Dvalinn played too long with sunlight, which he had probably stolen.

The possibility of a correspondence between this Old Norse charm and the proposed theme of the poetic section of the Old English charm Wið dweorh—which, comparably, is recited above the crown of a patient’s skull—is tantalizing. In the Norse inscription, we may have one supernatural personage, Búri/Buri, boring in to remedy a feverish headache caused by a dwarf (Búri’s relative?) called Bóurr. If so, we may compare, in the Old English charm, the ingangan ‘in-going’ of the remedial wiht, whose work is completed by the similarly ‘in-going’ sister of the afflicting dwarf. If my interpretation of the Old English text is broadly correct, the afflicting dwarf had earlier itself ‘gone into’ the patient’s skull.

A hole in the Ribe skull-fragment might indicate trepanation, the hole then being the opening through which the afflicting dwarf escaped, or was extracted, from the patient’s head. A more mundane explanation, however, is that this hole, which was apparently drilled from the inside, was simply intended for a suspension cord.

Another Headache-Causing Dwarf and a Radiant Sword

The second Old Norse text which may offer some support for my interpretation of Wið dweorh (and aspects of Beowulf) is much later, but far easier to understand. The fourteenth-century Icelandic Sigurðar saga þogla ‘Saga of Sigurðr the Silent’ contains an episode which also

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48 Since dwarves lived in rocks, they were naturally rock-borers, but note also the dwarves Dolgpvari ‘Wound-Borer’ and Hornbori ‘Horn-Borer’, though the latter name might alternatively mean ‘Horn-Bearer’. If dwarves may be horses, the ‘horse’-term or proper name bólþvari ‘evil-borer’ may be relevant; PTP, 711–2, 937–8. Giants, who similarly lived in rocks, were apparently also borers; in addition to Gyril sárþvara (mentioned earlier), note the giant-name Blapþvari; PTP, 711. Alternatively, Bóurr might be the name of a human.
imagines a dwarf as a source of headache, in this case an explicitly night-time one.\footnote{A. Loth (ed.), \textit{Late Medieval Icelandic Romances}, 5 vols (Copenhagen, 1962–5), II, 113–7. On this episode, see also Battles, ‘Dwarfs’, 44–6, 49; Ármann Jakobsson, ‘Enabling Love’, 199–201.}

It describes how Hálfdan ‘Half-Dane’, son of King Lodivikus of Saxland (Saxony), came one day to a brook that ran down from a mountain in a gully. Nearby he saw a large stone, almost like a house, and shortly afterwards a duergsbarn ‘dwarf’s child’.\footnote{Loth, \textit{Late Medieval}, II, 114.} He threw a stone at the creature, breaking its jaw. Hálfdan reported this event to his brother, Vilhjálmr ‘Welcome Helmet/Protector’, who warned him that trolls and elves (clearly not distinct from dwarves here) are vengeful if crossed, but apt to reward good turns.

Sure enough, that night, as soon as Hálfdan fell asleep, he dreamt that a dwarf came to him, one bigger than that he had seen during the day. It was the dwarf-child’s father, who proceeded to curse him. Also, before disappearing, Duergrin laust med sprota .iij. hogg j hofud honum ‘The dwarf struck three blows on his [i.e., Hálfdan’s] head with a sprout/stick’, so that er Hálfdan vaknade hafdi hann fengit hofudverc suo strangann at honum þotti nær heilinn munde wt springa og matti hann ei ur reckiu risa þann dag ‘when Hálfdan awoke he had got such a severe headache that it seemed to him that the brain was on the point of bursting, and he could not rise from bed that day.’\footnote{Loth, \textit{Late Medieval}, II, 115.}

In a sense, then, the dwarf-father caused Hálfdan’s headache by entering his head, albeit only in a dream. Furthermore, headaches and bad dreams often accompany fevers. And if Hálfdan’s nightmare and incapacitation were accompanied by tossing and turning, we could have a parallel to the convulsions associated with a dwarf in Old English.\footnote{Note also an instance of a dwarf (also described as a thief) who caused extreme illness in a troll-woman, apparently while she was lying in bed at night, in chapter 6 of \textit{Þorsteins saga Vikingssonar} ‘The Saga of Þorsteinn, Son of Vikingr’; Rafn, \textit{Fornaldar sögur}, II, 398.}

No less interesting is the episode’s continuation, in which Hálfdan’s headache is cured and Vilhjálmr receives a remarkable gift.

The day after Hálfdan’s nightmare, Vilhjálmr went to the spot where his brother had injured the dwarf-child. There he saw the same child, whom he gave a gold ring,\footnote{A solar symbol?} to the creature’s delight. That night
Vilhjálmr dreamt that the dwarf-father came to him and thanked him for giving his child the ring. He said that his curse on Hálfdan must remain, but that the headache would get better. He also said he would give Vilhjálmr a sword unmatched for its sharpness, and that he would never be defeated in battle.

When Vilhjálmr awoke he discovered the sword at his bed’s head. It was suo gull j hioittunum at birte af vm alla lyptingina og næliga þotti honum loga eggjar hans er hann braa honum ‘was so golden in the hilt that there was brightness over all the poop deck, and it seemed to him almost as if its edges blazed when he drew it.’55 He called the sword Gunnlogi ‘Battle-Flame’, a name it bore henceforth.56

As we saw earlier, the same name describes another sword, the bjartr gunnlogi ‘bright battle-flame’ of Grettis saga—a weapon which in turn parallels the golden-hilted, sun-like giant sword of Beowulf. Vilhjálmr’s sword is arguably another manifestation of this special weapon. Its fiery radiance suggests that it may well be a solar weapon.57 There is also a parallel with the Anglo-Saxon dwarf’s implicit possession and relinquishing of sunlight in Wið dworh.

Additionally, there are parallels to draw between Hálfdan and Vilhjálmr on the one hand, and Hroðgar, son of Healfdene (= ON Hálfdan) and Beowulf, Hroðgar’s welcome, helmeted protector, on the other. Hroðgar, like Hálfdan, is effectively incapacitated by a monster—he broods on his sorrow and, in one scene, sunu Healfdenes ‘Healfdene’s son’ conspicuously takes to his bed in anticipation of another attack (645–51).

55 Loth, Late Medieval, II, 116.
56 Loth, Late Medieval, II, 116–7. Later in the same saga (Loth, Late Medieval, II, 139–41) we learn of a sword with a golden hilt inlaid with shining jewels. It had been made by four northern dwarves for the King of Sicily, but þetta suerd hafid stolit brutt þaddam jotunn einn nordan ur Suafua er Faunus het ‘a certain giant from the north, from Swabia(?), who was called Faunus, had stolen this sword away from there.’ With Faunus—a name indicative of a woodland creature, possibly horned—compare Saxo’s satyr Mimingus, custodian of a remarkable (stolen?) sword (see Chapter 8). Later still in the saga (191–2), a dwarf standing outside his stone house gives a brightly radiant dark-red stone (originally part of the setting or dawning sun?) to the titular hero.

57 Given the various twig-swords encountered in this study, we may wonder whether the sproti with which the dwarf struck Hálfdan is identical, or at least akin, to the radiant sword he gives to Vilhjálmr. Also noteworthy in this episode is the father-dwarf’s arrival after his child has been hurt, and his removal of the headache he had imposed. Cf., in the Old English charm, the sister’s arrival after the remedial wiht has harnessed the deor, and her promise that anyone who knew how to obtain or recite the incantation would not be so harmed in future.
Also, although Vilhjálmr, unlike Beowulf (who received Healfdene’s ornamented ‘firebrand’ as a reward for defeating Grendel), does not fight the afflicting creature, but rather gives its child a gold ring, he does similarly remedy the pain and acquires a radiant gold-hilted sword in the process. In Beowulf, the golden-hilted giant sword, wielded by the ring-mailed *hringa hengel* ‘prince of rings’ (1507), is described as having a *fetelhilt* ‘ring/chain(?)-hilt’ (1563) and being *hringmæl* ‘ring-marked/embellished’ (1564) when beheading Grendel’s mother; thus, in a sense, Beowulf could be thought to have, in a sense, given a golden ring to a monster in return for a golden-hilted, blazing sword of light.  

The Sun as Healer, Especially in Old English Remedies

Chapter 37 of *Vatnsdeela saga* also contains a potentially relevant episode concerning a cure for convulsive fits, albeit not feverish. A man afflicted by what he describes as unwanted occurrences of *berserksgangr* ‘going berserk’, but which are presumably epileptic fits, is cured by an appeal to *þann, er sólina hefir skapat* ‘he who has created the sun’, who was deemed the mightiest.  

Additionally, Old English remedies strengthen the case for interpreting the remediating *wiht* of *Wið dweorh* as the sun or a solar emissary. Indeed, the sun’s healing power is apparent elsewhere in *Lacnunga*.

Thus one *Lacnunga* remedy for a headache (not specifically feverish) requires the patient to lie face upward *wið hatre sunnan* ‘toward the hot sun’.  

Another remedy from the same collection, for toothache, prescribes words to be sung *syððan sunne beo on setle* ‘after the sun is in its seat [i.e., has set]’.  

The sung words are partly corrupt, but probably include the statement ‘*ne æceð þæc ofer eall þonne alið; coliað þonne hit on eorðan hatost byrneð*’ ‘It will not ache for you immeasurably when it lies down [i.e.,

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58 Perhaps also compare Skírnir’s proposed gift of a marvellous ring to Gerðr. Although she is initially unimpressed by the offer, she might still have received the ring in exchange for agreeing to marry Freyr.  
when the sun sets]; it will cool [i.e., the pain/inflammation will lessen] when it burns hottest on earth [i.e., tomorrow afternoon, when the sun is strongest].’ From the reference to cooling we may reasonably infer that the toothache-causing infection had led to inflammation or fever.

Elsewhere in Anglo-Saxon literature, an Old English penitential text records another sun-related remedy for fever:

\[ \text{Wif gif heo set hire dohtor ofer hus oððe on ofen forþam ðe heo wylle hig feferadle gehælan: fæste heo VII winter.} \]

If a woman places her daughter above a house or in an oven because she wants to cure her of a feverish illness: she is to fast for seven years.

Presumably, the feverish daughter would be placed on the roof to be nearer the sun’s healing heat. The severity of the prescribed penance may attest to the practice’s heathen origin and tenacity. To this day, the popular belief persists that one should ‘sweat a fever’.

**The Dwarf and Grendel as ‘In-Going’ Fever-Demons**

We saw in Chapter 11 that the thieving lunar creature of Riddle 29 finds parallel in Grendel in some key respects. So too, I believe, does the afflicting dwarf of *Wið dweorh*, albeit less clearly.

If I have interpreted the Old English charm’s basis correctly, the absconding dwarf-horse-beast had entered, and secreted itself within, the head of a human. There its solar heat had caused a fever, which was attended by convulsions (possibly due to the invader bucking like a deer), of which the patient involuntarily partook.

Grendel—a potentially horned, even antlered creature—was similarly an *ingenga* ‘in-goer’, ‘invader’ (1776), a noun found only here.\(^63\) He had broken through the *muþan* ‘mouth’ (724) of the stag-hall Heorot and thereby implicitly entered its head. There, by night, he took up ruling residence (*rixode* ‘he ruled’, 144; *Heorot eardode* ‘he

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\(^{63}\) Dronke, ‘Beowulf’, 305 says that ‘the simplicity of the word is striking in the context’. Note also that Grendel’s mother, who is suggestive of a convulsive mare-monster (see Chapter 8), attempted to gain *ingang* ‘in-going’, ‘entry’ (1549) to Beowulf’s prostrate body with her seax.
inhabited Heorot’, 166; *goldsele Grendel warode* ‘Grendel occupied the gold-hall’, 1253), and later, when wrestling with Beowulf, convulsed its interior (767–82, 997–1000). As a result of Grendel’s attacks, Hroðgar, who as ‘shelter of the Ing-Friends’ is implicitly identified with Heorot, suffered mental anguish. In his words, after a hundred seasons of secure rule:

‘... me þæs on eþle edwend cwom,
gyrn æfter gomene, seofðan Grendel wearð,
ealdgewinna, ingenga min;
ic þære socne singales wæg
modceare micle.’ (1774–8)

‘... of this there came to me in my native land a reversal, affliction after amusement, when Grendel, the old adversary, became my in-goer; from that visitation I continually bore great mind-care/anxiety [or “I continually bore the great mind-care of that visitation”].’

Following Hroðgar’s prominent references to the prospect of adl ‘disease’ shortly earlier in the same speech (1736, 1763), we might also hear a pun on *seocnes* ‘sickness’ in *socne singales*.64 Whether that possibility is accepted or not, there are strong reasons for thinking that Grendel is imagined partly as a demon of disease (see also Chapter 1). He appears early in the poem as a *wiht unhælo* ‘creature of unwholesomeness/unhealthiness’ (120).65 His sickness, and that which he implicitly inflicts, was in some sense feverish. For Grendel was a demon whose eyes, which gleamed with a hideous light *ligge gelicost* ‘most like fire’, suggest a fierce internal heat—a gleam mentioned at the very moment he entered Heorot (724–7), a hall destined ultimately to be consumed by

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64 On Grendel as a disease-spirit, see also G. Hübener, ‘Beowulf’s “Seax,” the Saxons and an Indian Exorcism’, *RES* 12 (1936), 429–39; Anderson, *Understanding Beowulf*, 77–87. In similarly arguing that Grendel is a disease-spirit who ‘takes up residence in the body [of Heorot]’, Anderson refers to other Old English charms, but overlooks *Wið dweorh*.

65 Cf. the feminine noun *hæl* ‘health, happiness, sound physical condition’, and the adjectives *hal* and *hæl* ‘hale, whole’; note the sly joke anticipating Grendel’s future state, as he will be literally ‘un-whole’ when he loses an arm. Also pertinent is the neuter noun *hæl* ‘omen’; see my discussion of the *Liber monstrorum* in Chapter 14. In addition, Grendel’s status as a *þurs* ‘giant, demon’ may be noted, as this word’s Old Norse cognate, *þurs*, denotes a type of health-afflicting creature in some contexts; see Chapter 9 and Frog, ‘The (De)Construction of Mythic Ethnography I: Is Every *þurs* in Verse a *þurs*?’, *RMN Newsletter* 6 (2013), 52–72.
flames. I think it no coincidence that earlier, when addressing the Danish coastguard, Beowulf had implicitly identified himself as the means by which Hroðgar could effect an overpowering *bot* ‘remedy’ which would cause the *cearwylmas* ‘boiling anxieties’, caused by Grendel in Heorot, to become *colran* ‘cooler’.\(^{66}\)

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{‘I can give Hroðgar advice about this through a roomy heart [i.e., with generosity], how he, old/wise and good, may overpower the enemy—if for him a reversal, a remedy for the baleful attacks of affliction, should ever come about in turn—and those boiling anxieties become cooler; otherwise, always thereafter he will suffer a torment-time, throe-necessity as long as the best of houses dwells there in its high place.’}
\end{align*}
\]

From this passage it appears that Grendel was, from one perspective, a nocturnal fever-demon, like the dwarf of *Wið dweorh*. This interpretation is strengthened by the likelihood that, as Michael Lapidge has observed,\(^ {67}\) Grendel may be readily categorized as a *nihtgenga* ‘night-goer/walker’. Although this word does not appear in *Beowulf*, it would suit Grendel perfectly, as he was not only an *ingenga* but also a nocturnal *angeng(e)* a ‘lone-walker’ (165, 449) who, as a *sceadugenga* ‘shadow-walker’ (703), *com ... gongan* ‘came walking’ (710–11). As Lapidge also notes, *nihtgenga* appears in several Old English remedies. The content and context of these shows, or strongly suggests, that they are for headache, fever or another affliction of the head or mind.

One such cure, for a very old headache, from the Old English *Leechbook III*, requires that little stones from the maw of young swallows be placed on the sufferer. It claims that *hi beop gode wip heafodece ond*


\(^{67}\) Lapidge, *‘Beowulf and the Psychology’*, 390–2.
The Waning Sword

A second remedy from *Leechbook III* against *nihtgengan* immediately precedes an alarming cure for a person whose *heafodpanne beo gehlenced* ‘skull is distorted(?).’ One is to lay him face upwards, drive two stakes *æt þam eaxlum* ‘at the shoulders’, lay a plank across his feet, and then strike it three times with a sledgehammer—perhaps to expel an internalized demon.

A third remedy from *Leechbook III*, which follows remedies for ear-pain and precedes a cure for ‘elf-sickness’ (mentioned in Chapter 4), begins: *Wyrc sealfe wiþ ælfcynne ond nihtgengan ond þam mannum þe deofol mid hæmð* ‘Make a salve against the elf-race and night-walkers and the people with whom the Devil has sexual intercourse’. It concludes:

> Gif men hwilc yfel costung weorþe oþþe ælf oþþe nihtgengan, smire his ondwlitan mid þisse sealfe ond on his eagan do ond þær him se lichoma sar sie, ond recelsa hine ond sena gelome. His þing bip sona selre.70

If any evil temptation or elf or night-walkers71 should befall [or ‘settle in?’] a man, smear his forehead with this salve, and put it on his eyes and where(ever) his body may be painful, and cense him with incense and make the sign of the Cross frequently. His condition will soon be better.

A fourth cure, the very first in the *Old English Herbarium*, asserts that betony *scyldþ wið unhymum nihtgengum and wið egeslicum gesihðum and sweftnum* ‘shields against monstrous night-walkers and against terrible visions and dreams’.72 It is immediately followed by remedies that employ betony for a *heafod tobrocen* ‘broken head’ and for afflictions of

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70 Cockayne, *Leechdoms*, II, 344.
71 The use of the plural noun with the singular verb *weorþe* may indicate that *nihtgengan* is an afterthought or that it was originally a gloss to *ælf* which subsequently became incorporated into the main text.
72 H. J. de Vriend (ed.), *The Old English Herbarium and Medicina de Quadrupedibus*, EETS o.s. 286 (Oxford, 1984), 30 (see also 1).
the eye, ear, nose and teeth—head problems. Here *nihtgengum* translates the Latin text’s *nocturnas ambulationes* ‘nocturnal walkings (about)’.

The first of the aforementioned cures suggests that night-walkers may have been associated with spring fever (possibly tertian malaria) and the Devil’s temptations. The nature of these (sexual?) temptations is unspecified, but they call to mind the *wom wundorbebodum / wergan gastes* ‘crooked/perverse wonder-biddings of the accursed spirit’ which, in *Beowulf*, pierce the sleeping soul and are equated with the piercing shaft of a slayer suggestive of Grendel (1741–7). We may be justified in relating this shaft to the folkloric concept of ‘elf-shot’, since the third remedy from *Leechbook III* cited above pairs the night-walker with the elf-race, a group of beings which *Beowulf* numbers among Grendel’s kin: *eotenas ond ylfe* ‘giants and elves’ (112).

Intriguing, too, is the possibility that the immediate context of the second and fourth of the cited remedies associates nightwalkers with the most serious of physical head injuries, namely those involving broken bones. This could tie in with Grendel’s wrecking of Heorot.

In conclusion, I suggest that, rather as a nocturnal dwarf-horse-beast seems to have brought hot sunlight within the cranium of a human, who then convulsed with fever (like a bucking deer?), so the fiery disease-demon Grendel brought feverish cares inside, and wracked, the head of the stag-hall and concomitantly that of its lord. By extension, *Beowulf*, whom Hroðgar considers the emissary of *halig God* ‘holy God’ (381–2), played the part of the remedial solar *wiht* on behalf of the representative or incarnation of the sun-god Ing. In other words, *Beowulf*, who along with his men wore *scir* ‘bright’ armour that *scan* ‘shone’ (321–2, 405,

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73 Although, as noted by A. Hall, *Elves in Anglo-Saxon England: Matters of Belief, Health, Gender and Identity* (Woodbridge, 2007), 127, it is not clear quite what is meant by OE *nihtgenga*, I see something of the somnambulist, the prototypical undead zombie, in Grendel. He is a nocturnal walker who comes from a mere identified with Hell, and is therefore in some sense dead, but also stalks the earth alive; he is at once bound by the metaphorical deathly sleep of sinfulness and yet blazingly awake—until, that is, his final sleep upon his deathbed.

74 Generally on Anglo-Saxon elves and elf-shot, see Hall, *Elves*.

75 As a nocturnal demon from polluted swampland (like the devils who tormented Guðlac in the marshes of Crowland), Grendel was conceivably once a bringer of malaria, an often fatal disease that causes fever, delirium and convulsions. Malaria’s presence in Anglo-Saxon England has not been proven, but the disease is thought likely to have been endemic; see M. Ziegler, ‘Mapping Malaria in Anglo-Saxon England’ (5 February 2012), https://contagions.wordpress.com/2012/02/05/mapping-malaria-in-anglo-saxon-england
1895), effects for the ‘Bright-Danes’ the *beorhtre bote* ‘bright remedy/compensation’ (158) which, the poet had earlier observed, would not be forthcoming from Grendel, the *deorc deapscua* ‘dark death-shadow’ (160). That Beowulf brings a ‘remedy’ to Hroðgar and Heorot is underlined later when the king, gazing upon Grendel’s severed arm, thanks the Almighty for the *bote* (934) of which he had recently despaired.

In the next chapter I return to the Old Norse poem *Sólarljóð* for a detailed interpretation of two stanzas that seem to me likely to relate a myth similar to those found in *Riddle 29* and *Wið dweorh*. It too concerns the recovery of sunlight, this time symbolized by a hart’s horn. In the process, I will present further Old Norse evidence identifying dwarves with stags, the moon, giants and the theft of sunlight. This evidence will bolster my interpretation of *Wið dweorh*. More importantly, it will increase the likelihood that myths of sun and moon may explain, from a native Germanic perspective, the giants’ possession of the probably sun-like giant sword in *Beowulf* and that weapon’s recovery and presentation to Hroðgar.